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GANGAMMA JATARA : A Post – Tsunami Ritual of Worshipping Sea by the Fisherwomen of Visakhapatnam

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Nobody from South Asian Countries can forget December 26, 2004 as it claimed in the name of tsunami innocent lives of more than 15,000, besides rendering thousands of fishing crafts and gears and fishery – related other infrastructures in India, etc.

Thousands of survivors in Tamil Nadu and Kerala pray at the graves of the victims. They throng on local beaches on the tsunami anniversary day. They conduct candle light marches and memorial services. Fishermen stay away from the sea on 26th December every year as a mark of respect to the

victims. Survivors of tsunami from the hit hamlets around Arattupuzha in Kollam District of Kerala observed the 2007 anniversary as *deception day* to protest at the Government's slow pace of rehabilitation measures.

In the coastal areas of Visakhapatnam, although no life was lost in the tsunami – 2004, thousands of fisherwomen from Peda Jalaripeta village and some from other fishermen colonies of the city offered special prayers on 26th December 2007, which was christened as *Gangamma Jatara* day. On this day, every year since 2004 they have been worshipping on tsunami anniversary day

regularly on 26 December praying to the Goddess of Sea not to cause any tsunami but to show mercy and keep them safe and happy, especially the menfolk who venture into sea. They believe strongly that their prayers on every anniversary of tsunami will not allow yet another tsunami to happen.

On the *Gangamma Jatara* Day, fisherwomen, holding metal pots with water on their heads walk in a procession from Peda Jalaripeta to RK Beack accompanied by traditional drums. The menfolk and children also accompany them. On the *Jatara* day of 2007 rituals were organised under the leadership of their head priest. The honourable Mayor, Deputy Mayor of Visakhapatnam, MIA and many other social and political leaders also participated.

